

Town of Manahawkin  
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail  
Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and  
State Route 180  
Manahawkin  
Ocean County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1026

11/20  
NJ  
15-MANAK,  
4-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## TOWN OF MANAHAWKIN

HABS No. NJ-1026

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Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and State Route 180, Ocean County, New Jersey.

Significance: Already inhabited in the mid-1700s, Manahawkin was one of the earliest settled areas in Ocean County. Like the other Barnegat bay towns, by the mid-1800s Manahawkin prospered, depending on a combination of maritime industries and extensive natural resources.

History: Though little is known about the founders of Manahawkin, the village developed from a group of farms between Barnegat and Cedar Run. The town was originally named Mannahocking, the Indian word for good land or good land for corn. When Rev. Thomas Thompson visited the area between 1746 and 1750, he wrote in his journal that the "inhabitants are thinly scattered in regions of solid wood."<sup>1</sup> According to a local historian, water-wheel powered saw mills were constructed along Mill Creek about this time and cedar from the swamp, now Manahawkin Lake, was cut into marketable lumber. A gristmill was built on the southern fork of Mill Creek.<sup>2</sup> By 1755, there were at least twenty farms in the area and a free house of worship was established three years later. In 1770 a group of nine baptists founded the church on Main Shore Road.

Depending on a combination of maritime industries and extensive natural resources, primarily lumber, charcoal and bog iron, the inhabitants of Manahawkin lived in a busy town by mid-1800s. A flourishing village, consisting of "a Baptist and a Methodist church, saw, grist, turning and carding mills, 2 taverns, 3 stores and about 40 dwellings,"<sup>3</sup> in the 1840s, Manahawkin's development far exceeded that of nearby Barnegat, with a mere thirty dwellings as well as Waretown, which had only one tavern, one store and a few dwellings. Much of the early building was the work of Benjamin Oliphant, who arrived in 1813 and purchased the mills and land around the lake and Route 9. He expanded the sawmill, shipped cedar lumber to New York and built homes on his lakeside property. With the help of his two sons, Samuel and Joseph, Oliphant remodeled the eighteenth century "Old Stone Store" into a modern general store. The building, off Route 180 just south of the lake, is all that remains of the family businesses, which once included a farm and a boat building yard.<sup>4</sup>

Though most of the Oliphant lumber was probably transported by ship, inland towns were reached by a network of small roads, such as the Old Country Road between

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<sup>1</sup> "Thinly Scattered Residents Became Stafford Township," New Jersey Courier (June 16, 1966.)

<sup>2</sup> Jack Cervetto, Sr., A Brief History of Stafford Township (Tercentenary Committee, 1964), 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> John Barber and Henry Howe, Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey (New York: S. Tuttle, 1846), 369.

<sup>4</sup> Cervetto, 13-14.

Cedar Bridge and Manahawkin. The Tuckerton stage coach line had a tavern stop in the town prior to 1823, when a second line was established extending farther inland.<sup>5</sup> In 1871, Manahawkin became a stop on the Tuckerton railroad. Thirteen years later the Pennsylvania Railroad Company transformed the economy by building a bridge from the town to Long Beach Island. Already supplying coastal and inland communities with lumber, Manahawkin now participated in the island's "building boom." A spur of the main track ran into nearby Cedar Run, where gravel pits were located in the vicinity of Route 9 and Green Street. The gravel and other supplies passed through the main part of town on their way to the island.<sup>6</sup> The railroad station originally built on the corner of Stafford and Letts Avenues, has recently been moved to a new location near the Old Stone Store.

Once the mainland railroad stop on the way to Long Beach Island, Manahawkin is now identified by a cloverleaf highway interchange near the lake, where Route 9 meets 72. Despite traffic and strip development, the town retains its basic urban plan. The residential district between Hillard and Stafford Avenues includes many well-preserved Victorian homes, a funeral parlor and a cemetery. Beginning with a view of the lake, Stafford moves west toward the bay, passing the Methodist Church, several Victorian homes and some abandoned sheds. Partway through the Manahawkin Wildlife Management Area, the avenue changes to a narrow gravel road surrounded first by tall pines and other trees and then by bay grasses. On the way to the small dock-like bridge at the end of the road, one shares silence and space with herons, egrets and other endangered birds. The platform provides a place for fishing, crabbing and viewing the scenery with the Long Beach Island visible in the distance.

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Summer 1991

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<sup>5</sup> "Ocean County Historical Sites Survey, Stafford" (Toms River: Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1981), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Cervetto, 17-18.

- Sources: Barber, John, and Henry Howe. Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey. New York: S. Tuttle, 1846.
- Cervetto, Jack, Sr. A Brief History of Stafford Township. Tercentenary Committee, 1964.
- "Ocean County Historical Sites Survey, Stafford." Toms River: Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1981.
- "Thinly Scattered Residents Became Stafford Township." New Jersey Courier, 16 June 1966, n.p.
- Woolman, H.C. and T.F. Rose. Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast. Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985.

Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatz (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.

